

Top Ten Tips to Make the College Applications Process Smoother

From FLO's Education and Youth Officer Becky Grappo

Here are my "Top Ten Tips"!

1. **Plan early.** Make sure the course selections you make now keep you on the college prep track. Plan your courses with your guidance counselor, and make sure he/she knows what your goals are. Make sure he/she knows your name and likes you! You need them as an ally!

2. Also make sure that you think about your **extra-curricular activities**. Schools look for leaders and participants - it's important to be involved in the life of the school. They also like to see some form of community service (church activities count, too, if your school doesn't have an organization).

3. **Grades count.** Need I say more?

4. **SATs count, too.** Although the changes in the format of the SAT will kick in with the January 2005 test, they are still a fact of life. You should do some practice SAT questions and take the PSAT if you haven't already. There are CDs and work books you can buy to help boost your scores (produced by Kaplan).

5. **College essays are vital!!!** Don't procrastinate - this needs to be a sample of your best writing, and your "voice" needs to be heard. The admissions people want to feel like they've met you on paper. By doing it early, you'll have a chance to let other readers edit your work. You might choose a favorite teacher or the guidance counselor if the counselor has time, or another trusted adult to edit your work. I can't emphasize this enough - a good essay can make up for deficiencies in other areas. Draw upon your overseas experiences to show them that you bring a different perspective to the student body! Usually this can be artfully woven into whatever essay question they give you. Use that to your advantage. Emphasize anything that makes you different or especially unique!

6. **Good recommendations are important.** Be sure to maintain good relationships with teachers or other adults who can vouch for you. They'll need to write on your behalf so this is a good reason to be sure to put your best foot forward every day! Give them some talking points and a resume to help them know what you would like for them to emphasize.

7. **Apply to at least 5 schools** - sometimes it's not so easy to understand how colleges make their decisions, and most people would agree that admissions standards are getting more rigorous every year. Most kids opt for a "stretch" school that they know they'd be lucky to get into, some schools they have a pretty good chance of getting into, and one or two "safety" schools - those that

are sure bets. You want to be sure that you have options - there's nothing worse on April 1 than having rejections from all schools. It happens occasionally - just be sure you have your safety schools so it doesn't happen to you! (And don't take the rejections personally - ALL kids go through this! I don't know anyone who got into every school they applied to.)

8. When you finally apply, **check and triple check your application** to make sure it's complete. You only have one chance to make a first impression - if you do it incorrectly or leave something out...well, they might automatically shift you to the "other" pile.

9. After you apply, **FOLLOW UP** to be sure they got all your information (unless your college specifically says don't call us, we'll call you). College admissions staffs deal with so much paper that it's easy to lose or misplace things. And the electronic applications can sometimes have glitches. You want to be sure it's not YOUR application. It will also show that you are really interested. They like that!

10. If there are any snags in the application process, ask your school guidance counselor to make a phone call on your behalf. **Don't be afraid to ask for help** - if you get in, it makes them look good, too!

Good luck!